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SUBJECT: BELGRADE'S RESPONSE TO STATE 138362 (C-RE6-01248)

REF: SECSTATE 138362

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHAEL C. POLT FOR REASONS 1.4B AND D

11. (U) The following is Embassy Belgrade's response to INR's questions in reftel.

12. (C) Response follows (reftel's questions in caps):

1A. (C) WHAT IS THE NATURE OF KOSTUNICA AND TADIC'S RELATIONSHIP?

(C) The President and Prime Minister continue to balance their dislike for each other with their mutual need for basic cooperation by democratic forces to survive an election. As we approach the endgame on Kosovo, they appear to be more willing to work together and speak from the same uncompromising position. Increasingly, they have referenced similar points in public (the current insecurity for Serbs in Kosovo, no acceptance of an independent Kosovo, no acceptance for a Kosovo army). Independence for Kosovo would solidify this cooperation as both men seek political cover from accusations that they "lost Kosovo"; it might also open the door to more competitive jingoism. In general, both men delink personal animosity from political calculus, though there is quite a bit of suspicion and distrust right below the surface.

1B. (C) HOW WILL KOSTUNICA REACT TO TADIC AS COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF THE SERBIAN MILITARY? WILL HE ATTEMPT TO ASSERT CONTROL THROUGH THE DEFENSE MINISTRY? WILL THERE BE A MOVEMENT FOR A NEW SUPREME DEFENSE COUNCIL IN WHICH POWER IS SHARED AMONG MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT?

(C) Kostunica is not likely to directly challenge Tadic's statutory role as Commander and Chief of the Serbian military) he explicitly acknowledged it in a meeting with the Ambassador in mid-August. It is likely that both parties will use the constitutional process to redefine the CinC authorities for the armed forces and the MoD's relationship to the government and president, respectively.

(C) Kostunica is, though, apparently blocking Tadic's attempts to name a politically loyal, reformist CHOD (Zdravko Ponos)) but more likely due to policy differences over the pace and scope of military reform than as an attack on Tadic's authorities. There was some talk in the late spring about constituting a bi-cephalous national security council, but Tadic voiced opposition and the proposal does not seem to have gone anywhere.

(C) In addition, the PM will likely look for ways to suggest his own authorities as he did with his comments and media speculation on his supposed "control" of specialized anti-terrorism units. If that particular example is indicative, Tadic will not react too strongly on attempted inroads on his role as commander in chief but nstead seek to express his concern behind the scenes and perhaps directly to

the Minister of Defense. We expect Kostunica will continue to look for ways to carve out some role on the defense side) the details on how he will do that are likely to come out in the discussion of the package of legislation (in late September or October) that will be required to confirm and consolidate the transition from State Union to the Serbian Republic.

1C. (C) GIVEN THE ANIMOSITY BETWEEN KOSTUNICA AND DJUKANOVIC, WHAT WILL FUTURE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS BE LIKE?

(C) While Kostunica was clearly upset about the outcome of the referendum; Tadic's more constructive efforts to keep relations on an even keel have been largely successful. Dire predictions about Serbia not recognizing Montenegro or the countless problems on "practical issues," e.g. student status, pensions, etc. that were likely to arise have not panned out. Tadic has a significant say on foreign affairs and the details of diplomatic relations and appears to be quite committed to ensuring that the relationship is, at the very least, formal and correct. His Montenegrin counterpart, Vujanovic, has been equally constructive and restrained. There are continuing reports that Kostunica maintains close links with the Serb opposition in Montenegro and that Djukanovic may be looking for ways to counter that involvement. (Note: This cable does not incorporate US Office Podgorica's views. End Note.) There is no sign in Belgrade of any significant problems on the horizon between Podgorica and Belgrade.

1D. (C) WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KOSTUNICA AND KOSOVO SERB HARDLINERS MARKO JAKSIC AND MILAN IVANOVIC?

(C) Jaksic is a leader in the Kosovo chapter of the DSS and likely maintains a close working relationship with Kostunica through the Head of the CCK and DSS VP Raskovic Ivic. Ivanovic is more of a hired gun available to whoever is willing to pay) he worked at various points for Milosevic (against Kostunica), for DOS (with Covic) and now for Kostunica. We have certainly never seen and would be surprised if Kostunica were to make any detailed comment restraining local Serb leaders in Kosovo. More likely he works through the security services and through numerous

private channels to "monitor and manage" the local environment. Recent reports suggested that CG pressure about problems in Northern Kosovo had prompted some such quiet expressions of concern from Belgrade resulting in some toning down of Kosovo Serb rhetoric (at least before the latest controversy about Ahtisaari's alleged remarks and the grenade-throwing incident in North Mitrovica). We continue to hear reports that both Jaksic and Ivanovic have lined up apartments and business interests in Belgrade, suggesting considerable coaching rather than a romantic (or spontaneous) fight for their beloved homeland. We expect the PM has and will continue to use Jaksic and Ivanovic to reinforce his expressed commitment to stand up for Serb rights) a kind of pressure valve for directing unhappiness in northern Kosovo away from Belgrade and towards the international community.

(C) WHAT DEGREE OF CONTROL, IF ANY, DOES KOSTUNICA AND HIS ADVISERS EXERT OVER HARDLINERS IN THE NORTH OR THEIR ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS THE SERB NATIONAL COUNCIL (SNV) AND THE ASSOCIATION OF SERB MUNICIPALITIES AND SETTLEMENTS (ASMS)?

(C) In the past the CCK has provided significant funds, including through the hospital in Mitrovica and other channels, in support of the SNV and the ASMS. It is not clear, however, exactly how effective the CCK is on the ground. The SNV and the ASMS exploit their links to Belgrade and prey on the fears and frustrations of the Serb community in Kosovo, which looks to Belgrade for protection and financial support. The SNV and the ASMS are neither independent from Belgrade nor carefully controlled pawns of the CCK/DSS. They are both political actors and vehicles for

patronage and corruption.

(C) DO ANY OTHER SERBIAN POLITICAL LEADERS HAVE INFLUENCE OVER HARDLINE KOSOVO SERB LEADERS?

(C) The Socialists have traditionally fared better than the Radicals in Kosovo, probably due to Milosevic's legacy. Hardline Kosovo Serbs seem content with the maneuvering room and resources they are receiving. We do not see any sign from Belgrade that other political leaders are challenging that relationship. There is some symbiosis here: Kostunica sees political benefit from having DSS members like Jaksic represent a strong anti-independence view rather than ceding that role to the SRS or other affiliated group.

(C) We have not seen the SRS, SPS or other parties seek any tangible control over Kosovo Serb leaders. We would expect they cannot offer similar resources or protection. Belgrade is perceived as the critical, and perhaps only, patron. The SRS and SPS may, however, seek to exploit the situation if Kostunica is seen as weak and/or a failure by the Serbian electorate.

1E. (C) WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KOSTUNICA AND THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH (SPC)?

(C) Kostunica continues to have strong ties with the SPC. Bishop Amfilohije is the uncle of Kostunica's wife and Bishop Irinej of Backa is known to be an active participant in internal government discussions on nationalist issues.

(C) In general, we still see a split among the clergy on Kosovo between Bishop Artemije and Bishop Teodosije with the former advocating a hardline stance supported with allegations of "Islamic Jihadism" among Kosovo Albanians, and the latter who wants to prepare the SPC for a future in Kosovo regardless of status. Artemije brought his message of fiery rhetoric and intolerance to the US when he led a Serbian National Congress delegation in July, which CCK director Raskovic-Ivic confirmed to us was arranged in consultation with the GOS. After that visit, Artemije requested a meeting with the Ambassador, who very directly challenged him on the approach and his unhelpful and un-Christian behavior. The PM still views SPC deviation from GOS policy as a potential "Trojan horse" for Kosovo independence and overall weakness in Serbia's case.

(C) WHAT DEGREE OF INFLUENCE DOES HE HAVE ON THEIR THINKING?

(C) Kostunica and the SPC hardliners currently have the same outlook on Kosovo independence, which makes it hard to tell if there is any direct influence. He does not appear bothered by Teodosije to the level of making comments aimed specifically at the moderate Bishop and his supporters. Nevertheless, the PM went to Gracanica on Vidovdan and maintains close ties with the large part of the SPC which supports his inflexible stance on Kosovo.

1F. (C) WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPC AND KOSOVO SERB LEADERS?

(C) USOP is best placed to comment.

End response to reftel.
POLT